This work is openly licenced via CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/

WHO AND WHERE WAS 'WIDOW BOTT AT NASEBY'?

by Francis Howcutt

This article shows how administrative correspondence can shed light on local arrangements for a public health initiative and also reveal an unusual aspect of the life of one of the poorer members of society – who happened to be my 3x great grandmother.

Smallpox was a major scourge across much of the world until well into the 20th century. Many patients swiftly died, particularly amongst its youngest victims. Survivors had the benefit of future immunity but were often disfigured with pock marks and sometimes even left blind. It was not until around the end of the 18th century that Edward Jenner successfully promoted vaccination in this country using pus produced by cowpox - a much milder infection - to stimulate relatively safe immunity to smallpox.

Edward Jenner's first vaccination (Wikimedia Commons)

A report in 1853 from the Epidemiological Society describes in detail the progress of vaccination across a variety of countries. It found that in the previous year 601,839 births had been registered in England and Wales but the numbers vaccinated by the poor law Unions amounted only to 194,089 individuals under the age of one year and 203,039 of a higher age.[1]

In order to remedy the neglect of vaccination and tackle the smallpox outbreaks associated with it, Parliament passed an 'Act Further to Extend and Make Compulsory the Practice of Vaccination', which is usually referred to as the Vaccination Act 1853. This required every child whose health permitted to be vaccinated within three months of birth or four months if not in the care of a parent. Such vaccinations were to be carried out by the public vaccinator or by some other medical practitioner. The public vaccination service was free and not limited to young children but available to anyone who had not already been successfully vaccinated. Unions established following the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834 already ran the registration of births, marriages and deaths and had become responsible for arranging voluntary vaccinations within their parishes. In order to ensure compliance with the 1853 Act, local registrars of births issued vaccination certificates to parents of newborn babies which had to be returned signed by a doctor to confirm that the

[1] The report can be found in the Wellcome Collection:
https://wellcomecollection.org/works/p5bzvrjb/items

This work is openly licenced via CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/

vaccination had been duly performed. Parents who did not cooperate could be fined up to 20 shillings.[2]

Along with much else, the voluminous correspondence between central government and the Brixworth Poor Law Union sheds light on how vaccinations were organised locally. When Brixworth's completed questionnaire about its arrangements was returned to the Poor Law Board, a covering letter dated 13 January 1858 explained that contracts for providing vaccinations had been entered into with medical officers in 1841. The six vaccination districts serving 34 parishes operated from a total of eight premises. Vaccinations took place at each centre during fixed periods of one hour a week, apart from the surgery at Moulton which was held for an hour on both Mondays and Wednesdays. Three of the premises used - those at Brixworth, Guilsborough and Moulton - were the vaccinators' own surgeries, others being the school rooms at Spratton, Holcot and Harlestone and the dispensary at Brington. A different type of venue was used at Naseby. Patients from Cold Ashby, Haselbech, Thornby and Naseby itself could be vaccinated by Frederick Cox, a general practitioner of Welford, between the hours of 10 and 11 on Tuesday mornings by attending 'widow Bott's house at Naseby'.[3] This inspires two questions. Who was widow Bott and where was her house?

The widow

The 1851 census of Naseby records no widows among its inhabitants with either the surname Bott or its earlier form of Bodfish. In 1861, one such widow was present in the parish - Hannah Bott, described as aged 78 and born at Haselbech. Neither the 1851 or 1861 census record her 'rank, profession or occupation' but her husband Thomas was described as a pauper in the 1851 enumeration and as a labourer in July 1853 when he died as the result of falling off a hay-cart.[4]

Hannah Jerson was baptised at Haselbech in 1784, the youngest of the seven children of John Jerson[5] and Sarah, his second wife. That parish was still Hannah's home when she married Thomas Bott at Maidwell in 1803. Unlike her husband and all of their children for whom evidence has been found[6], Hannah was able to write her name (as 'Hannah Bot') in the marriage register. Thomas and Hannah had ten children born or baptised at Naseby between 1804 and 1826, six of whom outlived both parents. In 1861, the parish was home to 20 of Hannah's children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. However, she was the only person resident in her house at that stage and presumably had more space than most of the neighbours could have made available for a part-time surgery and its patients. There may, of course, have been a financial benefit involved but the questions asked by the Poor Law Board do not cover that topic. Hannah survived until 27 March 1864 when she succumbed to bronchitis. Four days later, she joined the large contingent of Botts buried in Naseby churchyard.

The house

In 1851, Thomas and Hannah Bodfish were recorded as living in a house at Back Street (now High Street) which they were sharing with Shadrach, their youngest son, his wife and infant daughter. The 1861 census did not mention road names in the village at all and Naseby had no street numbering at the time. Therefore, the location of widow Bott's house

[2] The text of the Act can be found at Internet Archive:
https://archive.org/details/b22279714/mode/2up
[3] The National Archives: MH12/8694
[4] *Northampton Mercury*, 16 July 1853, page 2, column 3
[5] Haselbech parish register records the burial on 18 November 1818 of John Jerson of Haselbech aged 85.
[6] The eight children who were married all made marks rather than signing the relevant registers.

This work is openly licenced via CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/

when it was used for vaccinations is not known. The building was almost certainly one of the many swept away when Naseby was largely redeveloped in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The appearance of Back Street in 1855 has been captured in this photograph which was taken by Rev William Law, the rector of Marston Trussell.

No picture has been found of Hannah Bott, but amongst the babies brought to her home for vaccination must have been her grandson Arthur Bott (1856-1905) for whom we do have the following photograph and also much further information.[7]

[7] *Arthur Bott's final walk* by Francis Howcutt
https://archive.org/details/arthur-bott-1856-1905-final-walk-v-4

This work is openly licenced via CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/

Appendix A – The next generation

The children of Hannah Jerson & Thomas Bott were:

	Baptised*	Married (children)	Died/buried*
Sarah	1804*	Daniel Cox 1823 (4)	1856* Naseby
Elizabeth	1805*	James Mawby 1827 (6)	1868* Peatling Magna
George	1808*		1834* Naseby
Hannah	1810*	George Bale 1830 (7)	1898 Husbands Bosworth
Catherine	1813*	David Hames 1832 (6)	1907 Great Bowden
Thomas	1816*	Catherine Bale 1840 (9)	1902 Naseby
Leah	1819*	n/a	1821* Naseby
John	c.1820 (born)	Ann Staines or Steans 1843 (1) Maria Sharman 1847 (3)	1898 Naseby
Charlotte	c.1825 (born)	William Burditt 1842 (1)	1843* Naseby
Shadrach	c.1826 (born)	Hannah Cornish 1848 (10)	1918 Naseby

The oldest seven children were all baptised at Naseby when infants. The baptisms of John (aged 12 years), Charlotte (aged 8 years) & Shadrach (aged 6 years) took place there on the same day - 3 June 1833.

Eight of the children and their spouses produced a total of at least 47 offspring of their own.